

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, March 1, 2013**

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## **Notes from Commissioner Gist**

### **1. Educators, families, students stepping up to meet graduation requirements**

Since our release of the 2012 NECAP results last month, I have been in touch with many educators across the state to get a sense of how we are supporting our high-school students to help them meet the graduation requirements and to prepare them for success. I am extremely pleased with what I've learned, and I have shared my enthusiasm with many folks in the media who have asked me for comment. Across our state, I see educators, families, and students stepping forward to take seriously the responsibility for school improvement. For example, before the release of the NECAP results, about 300 students statewide had signed up for use of our Virtual Learning Math Modules to improve mathematics achievement. Within two weeks of the release, 2,300 students had signed up – and the number is growing steadily! This is a strong signal that people are rallying together in support of our students, and this work must continue. I am very proud to see that so many Rhode Islanders are rallying around our students with a real belief that our students can meet these requirements, earn a meaningful diploma, and move on with confidence from high school into postsecondary education or a challenging career.

### **2. RIDE awaits information about effect of sequestration**

In this week's Field Memo, I have included information from the U.S. Department of Education about the potential effects of

[sequestration](#) of federal funds. At this point, we have little information about how sequestration will affect us in Rhode Island at the local level. In a conference call earlier this week, Education Secretary Arne Duncan did assure states that there will be little effect on education during the current school year and that funds already allocated will be unaffected by sequestration. The Secretary also noted that, when the anticipated 5-percent cut to federal programs goes into effect during the next school year, district will feel the cuts in different ways – some will have cuts of a little more than 5 percent, some a little less. He called the current situation complicated and confusing, adding: “There’s nothing good in this for young people trying to get education; I have no ability to mitigate the challenges – we’re just going to have to cut across the board.”

We will continue to monitor this situation closely, and I will provide you with any information we receive about the effect of sequestration on your budgets or on federal support for statewide initiatives. Meanwhile, it is important that we continue to focus our efforts on using taxpayer resources wisely and on providing an excellent education for all of our students.

### **3. RIDE to send embargoed materials on PARCC assessments to superintendents on Monday**

As I noted to you last week, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Consortium is preparing two sets of documents for release next week: guidance and a calculator tool to help LEAs prepare to administer the computer-based PARCC assessments in 2015 and guidance on the number of testing sessions and testing times for the PARCC assessments. We expect to be able to send you these materials on and **embargoed** basis on Monday (March 4), either through a

Field Memo Alert or through RISSA. The embargo will lift and PARCC will send these materials to the media on Tuesday (March 5) at noon.

**From RIDE**

***Webinars and Training:***

**4. RIDE to hold WebEx on Curriculum-Course Linking in the IMS**

Curriculum directors and data managers who cannot attend the in-person work session on Monday (March 4), from 9 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., are invited to participate in a WebEx on Curriculum-Course Linking in the Instructional Management System (IMS) on **Thursday** (March 7, ) from 2:30 – 4 p.m. Curriculum-Course Linking is necessary to enable educators to view assessment reports that will soon be available. It is not necessary to have completed curriculum documents prior to attending the webinar. Participants should have with them the information they'll need to link courses to the corresponding curriculum in the IMS. For elementary schools, this may be a list of courses and information on the curriculum for each. For secondary schools, this might include a course catalog or its equivalent. To join the webinar, go to:

<https://globalscholar.webex.com/globalscholar/j.php?ED=164041527&UID=1135114772&RT=MiMxMQ%3D%3D>.

If prompted, enter your name and e-mail address. No password is required. For more information, please contact Laura Kacewicz, at [laura.kacewicz@ride.ri.gov](mailto:laura.kacewicz@ride.ri.gov) or 222-8993.

### ***Diploma System:***

#### **5. RIDE develops, posts new resources to support high schools implementing progress plans**

In response to requests and suggestions that RIDE staff members received during the recent high-school visits, we have made new documents available and we have revised some of the existing documents. These new or revised documents include a progress-plan template as well as a new general letter about the graduation requirements that you can share with families and students at parents' night, student assemblies, and other events.

Please visit the [Secondary Webpage](#) to access these materials and resources that we have developed to support school teams that are implementing progress plans and intervention strategies.

Within the next few weeks, we will post examples of effective intervention strategies that we collected during our visits to high schools. These intervention-strategy documents include descriptions, effectiveness measures, and contact information. Be sure to check the RIDE website regularly to see revised documents and new resources.

Please contact Stacy Mello, at [stacy.mello@ride.ri.gov](mailto:stacy.mello@ride.ri.gov), if you have questions about the available resources.

### ***Educator Evaluations:***

#### **6. RIDE contacting LEAs regarding methods for reporting evaluation data**

In preparation for the this year's evaluation-data collection, RIDE will be contacting all Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS) District Configuration Administrators to determine whether or not their LEAs are fully using the EPSS. For LEAs fully using the EPSS, the required data elements will be automatically calculated in EPSS and reported to RIDE. LEAs that are not using or are partially using the EPSS will need to submit a separate data file through the EPSS containing all required evaluation-data reporting elements. Please contact Tim Heavey ([tim.heavey@ride.ri.gov](mailto:tim.heavey@ride.ri.gov)) with any questions.

**7. LEAs must contact RIDE for permission to make personnel decisions this year without using Student Learning Objectives**

Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) are a required element of every approved teacher and building-administrator evaluation system. We are confident that the SLO process is strong and that it provides the structure and flexibility to accommodate all assignments. As Commissioner Gist has previously communicated, for the current school year only, an LEA may request the authority to make internal personnel decisions based on evaluation data without including SLO evidence. Please contact Lisa Foehr ([lisa.foehr@ride.ri.gov](mailto:lisa.foehr@ride.ri.gov)) with any questions or to make a request to request permission to make personnel decisions this school year without including SLO evidence.

***Data Collection:***

**8. LEAs asked to check course information on RIDE course-mapping tool**

Except for one school, High School Course Coding is completed. Thanks to all of you who worked with our course coder, Mary Neuman, to accomplish this important work. Please check your course information on the eRIDE course-mapping tool. Courses highlighted in red would indicate that there is a problem with your course listing. Please contact Mary ([mneuman\\_associates@cox.net](mailto:mneuman_associates@cox.net)) if you see courses highlighted in red. In the coming weeks, RIDE will be updating the course-mapping tool so that you can add or drop high-school courses for the coming school year. Again, thank you for your cooperation.

#### **9. LEAs urged to encourage parent participation in SurveyWorks, deadline extended to March 15**

Due to inclement weather, the SurveyWorks deadlines have been extended to March 15. SurveyWorks is once again asking for your support to encourage administrators, parents, and teachers to take the survey. The results of these surveys are most useful when all parents, teachers, students, and administrators participate. Schools are currently collecting perceptual and experiential information from all populations on issues that affect students' opportunities to learn and educators' opportunities to teach. Many schools use these data for school-improvement planning and parent communication.

SurveyWorks will release school reports later this year for schools that have reached the minimum response-rate thresholds. At this time, we are focusing on supporting schools to encourage parent survey response. The parent survey is short – it takes about 5-10 minutes to complete. It's a critical component of the SurveyWorks 360-degree feedback reporting. Many schools and districts attain parent-participation success by using auto-dial or e-mail list

communications from schools or districts to parents to direct to complete the survey, at: [surveyworks@ride.ri.gov](mailto:surveyworks@ride.ri.gov). As of today, only 82 of about 300 schools have received the minimum parent-survey response-rate threshold of 10 percent. We encourage you to support your schools in parent communication through the use of auto-dial or e-mail messages to parents encouraging survey participation.

### **From the U.S. Department of Education**

#### **10. Education Secretary Duncan comments on effects of sequestration**

Today, absent any last-minute action by Congress, automatic, across-the-board federal spending cuts - also known as the sequester - will go into effect. These cuts will have real consequences, especially for young children in low-income families, students with special needs, and teachers. Last month, Education Secretary Arne Duncan testified before the Senate (<http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/testimony-secretary-arne-duncan-senate-appropriations-committee-possible-impact-seques>) about the negative effects of sequestration. This week, he appeared on "Face the Nation" ([http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-3460\\_162-57570957/education-secretary-not-rocket-science-to-stop-dumb-sequester-cuts/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-3460_162-57570957/education-secretary-not-rocket-science-to-stop-dumb-sequester-cuts/)), noting "We don't have to be in this situation. This is not rocket science. We could solve this tomorrow if folks had the will to compromise - to come to the table and do the right thing for children and to try and keep growing the middle class." Also, the White House released new state-by-state reports (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2013/02/22/what-sequester#states>) showing how the sequester will impact jobs and middle-class families, and the U.S. Department of Education issued Title I and special education impacts by state and Title I

impacts by the nation's 100 largest school districts (<http://www.ed.gov/blog/2013/02/sequestration-would-hurt-students-teachers-and-schools/>).

#### **11. Education Secretary Duncan calls on schools to reduce gender-based violence**

In a February 28 letter to Chief State School Officers (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/secletter/130228.html>), the Education Secretary Arne Duncan requested immediate action to reduce gender-based violence in schools and ensure all students are safe. The letter was released at a White House event on teen dating violence prevention. The U.S. Department of Education National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments also released a new training module, "Get Smart, Get Help, Get Safe" (<http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/index.php?id=1511>) to help school nurses, counselors, and psychologists identify and respond to signs of abuse.

#### **From other organizations**

#### **12. Charter School Consortium to meet March 12**

Please see this message from the Rhode Island League of Charter Schools:

On Tuesday, March 12, the Rhode Island League of Charter Schools, in coordination with The Rhode Island Foundation, will host the 2013 Rhode Island Public Charter School Consortium. The conference theme—for teachers, by teachers, with teachers—seeks to leverage the insights, knowledge, and experiences of all Rhode Island teachers and

school leaders. The event is free, and participants who register by the end of the day today (March 1) will be entered to win an iPad 2. Follow this link for more information and to register:

<http://richarterconference2013.eventbrite.com/>.

***RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:***

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/fieldmemos/default.aspx>